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AUTHOR Campbell, Roald F.
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Abstract

The late 19th and early 20th centuries were the period of rapid urban development fostered by industrialization. This was also the period of system-wide development of city school districts funded by favorable tax bases from industrial property and from a complete cross-section of social strata. The first consolidation of districts began within the cities and, at least as an ideal, an elitist concept governed the selection of persons for a place on relatively autonomous school boards. Population shifts, decentralization of industry, and demands for local control have each served to erode the position of city boards. It is currently possible to see a trend toward more representative boards, having greater citizen involvement. Decentralized, federated school systems are in sight with the board free to become a more effective political force. Along with more force will come more responsibility because the board will be held increasingly accountable for the results of public education. (DE)

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THE FUTURE OF CITY SCHOOL BOARDS *

Roald F. Campbell

I have chosen to discuss the future of city school boards. I do this for two reasons: first, I have been most intimately involved in recent years with city schools and city school boards; second, while many school boards appear to be in trouble, city school boards seem to have even deeper trouble. City school boards are, of course, affected by the general conditions which pertain in the cities. There are those who think cities, particularly large cities, are beyond redemption and should simply be marked off. Indeed, crises in our largest city, New York, seem to give credence to such a view. But cities and their school boards in Philadelphia, Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles, and in many other places also face great difficulties. If we give up on cities, we give up on the nation. Already 70 per cent of our population lives in urban areas and that percentage will undoubtedly increase in the future. When I speak of cities, I not only include the large central cities, but also smaller cities and many of the surrounding suburban school districts, more and more of which are coming to resemble city school districts.

The growing urbanization of school districts will probably also be augmented by a continual reorganization of school districts. In some twenty years operating school districts have been reduced in number from over 100,000 to about 20,000 and I suspect the end is not yet. Further, reduction in numbers will probably mean the elimination of most small rural districts and a number of small suburban enclaves as well. Many of the districts formed in this process will probably possess the character of present day city school districts. Thus, while city school districts of 50,000 or more in total population number only 130

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today, that number will undoubtedly be increased in the years ahead and many other school districts will tend to resemble city school districts. This development plus the fact that a majority of our school pupils are already found in urban districts make it apparent that a consideration of the future of the city board of education is not an isolated but a general problem.

A School Board Tradition

Even at the risk of overlapping some of the considerations offered by David Tyack, I would like to deal briefly with the tradition of the city school board, a tradition which developed, for the most part, early in this century and flourished until about the time of World War II. First of all this was a period of great growth in cities. In 1910 we had 228 places of over 25,000 and by 1940 we had 412 such places. City school districts during this period were often the leading school districts. One need only recall the proud history of Detroit, Cincinnati, or San Francisco to recognize that many enlightened educational practices were followed in our city districts.

Cities were, of course, a product of our growing industrialization. Most of our industry was located in the cities. As a result, the tax base for schools and other public services was favorable. Cities during this period also housed all classes of people - the poor and the rich, the blue collar workers and the professionals, the foreign born as well as old line Americans. Negro migration from the South had begun but percentages of Negroes in most of our cities was small. Teachers and other school personnel were easily attracted to the cities. Salaries were better than in rural districts, educational practices were often advanced, and the urban situation was seen has having many cultural and social advantages.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were also the period of system-wide development of school districts in our cities. At one time many cities had multiple school districts. For instance, Chicago in 1851 even though its area and population were a fraction of what they are today, had seven school districts. In that year the power to employ teachers was taken from the local districts and in 1853 the position of city superintendent of schools was created, "to grade the schools and to introduce order and unity into the system."(1 Clearly, our first consolidation of school districts came within the cities. Many of the factors surrounding boards of education reflected the thrust toward the development of a unified school system. The election or appointment of board members at large was one reflection of such a thrust. The employment of a city-wide superintendent of schools was another example. The development of city-wide standards for the curriculum, school personnel, and school plant represented other examples.

Membership on a city board of education during this period was often seen as a sacred trust. Leading members of the community, particularly from the worlds of business and the professions, were placed on boards. At least as an ideal, an elitest concept governed the selection of persons for a place on the board. While these board members did not come from all segments of society, many of them appeared to take their charge seriously and tried to serve all parts of the community. Many of these business and professional leaders were not far removed from the farm and labor segments of the population and it may have seemed fairly easy in that less complex society for them to serve with some success all levels of the population.

(1 Elwood P. Cubberley, Public School Administration, Boston: Haughton Mifflin Co., 1929, p. 72.

School boards became impressed with their autonomy. While city districts, longer than others, remained dependent in some ways on mayors and city councils, the desire to keep the schools out of politics was a persuasive argument in cities as well as elsewhere. Thus, city boards gradually became less responsive to political parties and to city councils, and more responsive to the ever growing delegation of power from state legislatures. Unfortunately, in this process the needed relationships with local government and with other local agencies was also largely ignored. As a result, for instance, in most cities, parks had no relationship to school grounds and school health often had no relationship to the public health program. In this context, schooling tended to become synonymous with education.

While the position of superintendent of schools was created in the 1830's, the position was not common until after the Civil War. Professional training for the position had to wait until the present century. Cubberley & Strayer, early architects of the superintendency, stressed the need to develop a unified school system. Earlier, the superintendent was often in charge of the instructional program and a coordinate officer, the business manager, was in charge of the business program. In time, the business manager was placed under the direction of the superintendent and the superintendent became the executive officer of the board. With the increase in the size and complexity of the school enterprise in cities, many superintendents became not only chief administrators, but also chief policy makers for the school system. While some of these superintendents may have sought the policy making role, there was also a willingness on the part of many boards of education, when faced with complicated problems, to thrust the

policy making role on to the superintendent.[2] This reached a point in many city school districts where it could be said with considerable truth that the superintendent ran the schools.

New Constraints on City Boards

But as most of you are well aware city school boards can no longer operate in the old tradition. Cities have changed and with these changes a new set of constraints have been imposed on school boards. To begin with there has been a great change in the composition of the population. The white, middle class moved into the suburbs. These people were replaced by lower class migrants, most of them black, some Puerto Rican, some Mexican-American, and some Appalachian white. The migration of the middle class out of the city has taken a large part of the old leadership for school boards and for other civic purposes.

In addition to these population shifts there has been a decentralization of industry. New industrial sites are found around the city, often near the airports, not in the city. Thus at the very time that cities need more tax revenue for all social services, including education, the tax base necessary to provide that revenue has been eroded. Most cities get little redress for this condition at the hands of state legislatures, often their only recourse is to turn to the federal government. At present, the federal government seems more inclined to respond to the states than to the cities, hence, city school boards have never been in such dire financial circumstances.

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[2] See James D. Koerner, Who Controls American Education? Boston: Beacon Press, 1968, ch. 5.

Traditional curricula, traditional teachers, and traditional organizational arrangements in city schools do not serve well the new population of the city. Many students do not learn. In fact the longer they remain in school, the more they fall below national achievement standards. Pupils in grade two may be six months behind, by grade six two years behind, and by grade eight three years behind. Lower class parents, once docile, even apathetic, are up in arms about the failure of the school. These parents have been joined by a good many other critics of the school and as a result there is perhaps less faith in the efficacy of the school than at any time since Horace Mann. Instead of school board service being a sacred trust exercised by genteel people, it has become an enervating duty often subjected to the scrutiny of raucous onlookers.

In place of building a city-wide school system school boards are now confronted with demands for local control. To some in the ghetto, local control means complete local jurisdiction on such matters as the course of study, the selection of teachers, the discipline of youngsters, and the determination of the budget. Even building construction is to involve local planning and the employment of local labor. Extremists in this movement will brook no regulation from the board of education, the state legislature, or even the federal government. Only in terms of revenues do they expect to benefit from all levels of government. To be sure, there are many parents who are less demanding than those mentioned above but even these people are insisting on more local participation and more positive results from the schools. A major question before city school boards is one of deciding which functions can be decentralized and which can not.

Demands for local control are not limited to the parents. The students, particularly in secondary schools with large minority group enrollments, are demanding a piece of the action. Black history, black teachers, and black principals are often elements of this demand. Student activists are frequently stimulated by the more militant leaders of the minority groups. Many of these leaders have given up on the adults and think their chance of getting results rests mainly with the young people. Up to this point efforts to whip up militancy among the young have been relatively successful. There are, of course, many parents and adult leaders of minority groups who do not condone revolutionary approaches. Many of these people are not sympathetic with separatism in any of its forms. Their militancy comes in the form of insisting that minorities have equal opportunity to make it within the system. This means equal opportunity for jobs and for education--not just menial jobs, all kinds of jobs; not just vocational education, all kinds of education.

In face of these new demands membership on the board of education is no longer reserved for the elite. There is an increasing call for representation on the board of education. The Negroes, the Puerto Ricans, the Mexican-Americans demand places on the board. In turn, the back-lash whites become fearful of the policies these new members will espouse and they demand representation on the board. For instance, some residents of Northwest and Southwest Chicago complain bitterly about their lack of representation on the Chicago board. These persons have induced their representatives in the Illinois legislature to sponsor bills requiring election of board members from regional areas in the city. These developments also contribute to a splintering of a city-wide school system. Any plan of bussing pupils from crowded black schools to less crowded white schools, for instance, runs into immediate opposition, opposition hidden behind the neighborhood school concept.

As part of this ferment in city schools, teachers unions have become more militant. Demands for local control create real fear in many teachers that state or city-wide certification will be discarded in favor of acceptibility to students and parents. At this point the bureaucratic procedures of a large school system are avidly supported by the union and the rigidities which creep into all organizations are reinforced. In many ways the union supports traditional school board practices long beyond the time when those practices are germane to the times. Part of this rigidity is the right senior teachers have to transfer to more desirable schools. This results in the experienced teachers demanding places in the middle class schools and beginning teachers being placed in the slums. On this issue and many others slum parents and union members are at complete odds. This is the type of conflict with which the new city board of education will be confronted.

The city school crisis has become a matter of great national concern. The federal government must obviously provide some money to help alleviate conditions. But money does not come without strings. Based in part on the example of OEO legislation, provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 required for the first time that school boards identify the children of the poor and that compensatory programs be established for these children. In this Act and in other federal legislation the traditional jurisdiction of the school board was reduced. Many of us think this was necessary but nonetheless, boards were now told what to do, if of course they were to receive the money, instead of exercising their own discretion.

While some federal programs have been shifted to the state, the net effect on local boards of education is much the same - an

outside agency making decisions for the local board. In fact, for many city boards state control is more objectionable than federal control. For one reason, state departments of education are staffed, for the most part, with school people with rural backgrounds who have little understanding of, or sympathy for city school systems.(3

In addition to the constraints noted above, city boards are confronted, as are many other agencies, with the long shadow of cost-benefit formulations. Impressed with some success in the Department of Defense, cost-benefit analysis and related approaches are very much in vogue with the federal government. For dollars expended what benefits may be expected is the constant question. This formula is much harder to apply to schooling than it is to defense or to space, but the demand that such application be made permeates federal agencies including those that provide funds for education.

One component of the cost-benefit approach is the demand for a national assessment of education. This effort, financed by foundations and government, was at first resisted by school superintendents and perhaps by some board members. With modifications in procedures, school administrators have accepted the program and it will now be administered by the Education Commission of the States.

National assessment may provide more reliable indexes of the outcomes of educational programs and such measures could become important to the cost-benefit approach. All of these efforts focus attention on the results achieved by school programs.

(3 See Roald F. Campbell et.al., Strengthening State Departments of Education, Chicago: Midwest Administration Center, University of Chicago, 1967, ch. 4.

School boards now know that the enterprise over which they exercise stewardship will no longer be accepted on faith. Instead, there must be measurable results.

Future Directions

Projecting the future for city school boards is no less hazardous than prediction in general. Moreover, there is always the problem of confusing what may happen with what ought to happen. All I can do is suggest probable directions based upon what seem to be the observable signs of the times. At best any projection is a contingent one. The future of the city school board is bound up with the future of the city. We must make cities livable for all kinds of people, we must improve the housing of the poor, we must improve job opportunities for blacks and other minorities, we must reduce crime and delinquency, we must make the air fit to breathe. Unless we do these things, cities are doomed and the outlook for city school boards is bleak indeed.

But school board members can not just wait for others to regenerate the cities. Many citizens in the city are insisting that the school become an agency of social reform as well as a place for the instruction of the young. There are some areas of social reconstruction in which the school can play a part. The location of a new school plant and its relationship to the housing and employment problems of the city may be a case in point. School board resistance to large, centralized public housing projects may be an even clearer case. In other words, school board members must now take account of the social consequences as well as the educational consequences of their acts. This implies a more active political consciousness for board members, a point developed later.

I assume that cities will be made more livable. I also assume that this will be difficult, that it will take time, and that it will require the active participation of many people, including those who live in the slums.

In this process of reconstruction there are difficult days ahead for any public agency. School boards will be seared, their structure may be changed, but I think they can and will accommodate to the problems facing us. These accommodations will take a number of directions, some of which are now suggested.

The board of education itself will tend to become a more representative body. The elitest concept of the board, and one with which many of us have been comfortable, is being challenged on many fronts. As noted above, minority groups are demanding representation on boards of education. Any response to provide minority representation brings counter demands from whites who oppose moves to integrate schools or to provide compensatory programs for pupils from minority groups. Even caucus procedures for the nomination of school boards, used in some cities and more commonly in suburban districts, is breaking down. Frequently, an attractive candidate, not backed by the caucus has been able to win the election, often on the issue that the caucus itself is a device to thwart the will of the people.

Increasing representativeness of boards will probably come whether board members are appointed or elected. In those districts where the appointment procedure is employed, if appointment does not provide board members from many segments of the community, the procedure will probably be changed by the state legislature. Even if appointing officials are committed to a representative board the achievement of such a goal is not entirely possible. There are, for instance, more ethnic groups and more regional areas in most cities than can ever be accommodated on most boards with seven to eleven members. These difficulties not withstanding, the push for representativeness will probably persist.

Nor will all of these problems be resolved by the election of board members. If election be at large, some groups will again be left out. This will probably lead to the establishment of areas or wards from which school board members are to be elected. If this be done each board member will feel responsive to his constituents and less responsive to the total needs of the school system. At its worst, this system could make each board member a dispenser of patronage in his own area. This prospect may lead to some board members being elected from particular areas and some at large. In any case, I suspect we are in for a period of restructuring school boards in an attempt to make them more representative.

Closely related to representativeness is a second direction, that of greater citizen involvement. A decade or so ago many school men complained about the apathy of citizens, particularly those living in slum neighborhoods, regarding school affairs. Perhaps as part of the civil rights movement and a growing consciousness of the needs of the poor the situation has changed completely. Citizens are demanding a hearing. If school principals do not listen, demands are then taken to superintendents and board members. If appeals fail there, complaints are then carried to the state legislature and if need be to the Congress and various federal agencies. To help in assessing such appeals, the Congress and administrative agencies may use field workers in local communities to provide information about citizen views which may not come through official channels.

A growth in citizen participation means that the professionals will play a smaller role in decision making than they have in the past. It seems entirely likely that the unions, which have come to wield great power in the large cities, will have

that power significantly challenged by citizens. Certification procedures, transfer policies, promotion plans, and many other bureaucratic arrangements dear to union members will be changed because citizens will not put up with them.

In this process there will not be much patience with due process. Many lower class parents feel that due process is for the purpose of protecting other people and it is now their turn to decide who shall teach and what shall be taught. A few months ago I saw a group of parents insist that the Woodlawn Community Board demand that the Chicago Board of Education transfer a teacher found objectionable by Negro students. The regulations regarding transfer, definitive as they were, did not deter these parents from achieving their objective.

Many principals, superintendents, and other administrative officials will also find their decision making perogatives challenged by citizens. The idea that the schools belong to the people is being taken seriously. In this shift of power, some of the expertise possessed by teachers and administrators will be ignored. In time, however, this challenge may have salutory results. The professionals in the schools will be required to listen to citizens much more than they may have done. Moreover, the questioning of the knowledge base of the professionals may motivate the improvement of that knowledge base.

Increased citizen participation suggests the third direction, the <u>decentralization</u> of city school systems. In contrast with the press of a few decades ago, the creation of city-wide school system, the press today is for more flexibility, less standardization, and more local variation. In many places the demand is for local control. Most people when questioned about local control mean local participation but they all mean that

the desires of parents should make some difference in what is done in the school of the immediate neighborhood. This whole movement has become one of the slogans of the militant leaders of minority groups.

One of the real problems surrounding decentralization or local control is that of definition. In any organized society each sub-system or unit is to some extent dependent upon the larger system. Thus, there are some things that may be decentralized and others that cannot. Clearly, to decentralize financial support would be tragic. It seems doubtful that teacher certification and major curriculum developments such as the new mathematics, can be decentralized. On the other hand, teacher selection and certain curriculum adaptations should reflect local conditions. Work-study programs, for instance, should obviously be related to the work opportunities of a particular neighborhood. Even in this area, however, some schools may have to go beyond their own neighborhoods, if an adequate program is to be developed. Decentralization should help establish interdependence among the parts of the system, not isolation. What this means in practice is one of the real challenges ahead.

In any plan of decentralization school principals must play a key role. In large city or small it is the principal and the faculty of a single school that makes decentralization a reality. Programs of teaching and learning are organized and implemented at the school level, not at some regional or system-wide office. Parents need to be heard as individuals and perhaps also through some kind of elected parent council at the school level. Any participation of citizens at other levels should supplement not replace what is done at the school level.

Most boards of education have a long way to go to encourage, permit, and achieve participation at the school level. It means more careful selection of school principals - principals who can

work with teachers, pupils, and parents. It means more delegation of responsibility and authority to these principals. It means a slimming down of central and regional administrative offices in favor of providing assistance to principals as the operating line officers of the school system.

In addition to strengthening school operation at the school level, large cities will probably have to decentralize into regions or sub-districts. In some places this may take the form of legally dividing a large city school district into smaller city school districts as is now being done in New York City. In other cities a single school district may be retained as a legal entity but bona fide regions or sub-districts will be created within the structure. We have not been too successful with such plans to date, perhaps because superintendents and boards were loathe to delegate any powers to the subdivisions, but experience in St. Louis and other cities may suggest useful beginnings in this direction. For the immediate future it seems most important that various models of decentralization be tried and evaluated.

Whether by legal subdivision or by administrative arrangement it seems quite clear that the central board of education, or council as it is to be called in New York City, develop a federated school system. If large school districts are legally subdivided this central body will become, in some sense, an intermediate unit of school administration. This intermediate unit should exercise certain limited powers, chiefly those having to do with long-term planning and with the equitable distribution of money. Actual operation of schools would be left almost entirely to the newly created districts and their boards of education. Even if a large city remained as a single school district much the same transfer of power to the regions or sub-districts must take place. The subdistricts might have sub-boards

of education or at very least committees of citizens who have considerable influence with sub-district administrators and whose recommendations are taken most seriously by the central board of education.

As a fourth direction, and one already alluded to, the board of education of the future will function more frankly and more fully as a political force. This projection follows from more representative boards and greater citizen influence with boards. This may not take the form of partisan politics in the traditional sense. Political action in cities, even now, does not always follow the two party system; frequently, there are new coalitions and fusion parties. But whether through old parties or new there does not seem to be any way by which the board can remain out of politics.

Boards will be required to deal with other agencies such as those in health, welfare, housing, and law enforcement. In many cases these relationships will require a knowledge of political forces affecting these agencies and certainly in some cases effective collaboration between the school board and the other agencies cannot take place unless it is solidified at the political or governmental level. In this process of coalition and collaboration school boards will be required to exercise more political influence than they have in the past.

Already the great dependence of boards of education on actions taken by state legislatures is apparent. Any appreciable money demand on the part of teachers ends up with an appeal to the state legislature. Boards of education can raise money only within the limits established by the legislatures and those limits are frequently well circumscribed. This requires frequent appeals to the legislature and I suspect boards are going to become more adept through political coalitions in making these appeals.

In like manner boards may be expected to increase their effectiveness in the political realm at the national level. It is only a decade ago since many boards were debating the advisability of accepting federal funds. Very little reluctance on that issue remains. It now seems clear that city boards will seldom get all they need from state legislatures, hence they will be required to go to the federal government. With this recognition will come a determination to be as effective as possible politically at the national level. Again, coalitions will be required. Some of these may be with general city government, others may be with city boards across the country.

As a fifth direction, I suspect boards must deal much more than they now do with the purposes, procedures, and <u>results</u> of public education. Public education has numerous critics including many of its own clients. Part of this criticism stems from lack of understanding, part from lack of involvement, and part from the fact that in many cases a poor job is being done. Inevitably boards must deal with money but too often they have dealt inadequately with what the money is designed to buy. More money for the same programs will no longer do. There is a growing demand that increases in resources be related to programs which at least promise to be more effective.

Even the promise of effectiveness is not enough. There is an increasing demand that boards be held accountable for results. On every hand there is a call for appraisal and evaluation. Some times this is framed in input-output terms or as cost-benefit analysis. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the Coleman Report was a new definition of equality which emphasized outcomes and not merely opportunities.(4 If boards are to be held accountable for results,

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(4 James S. Coleman et.al. <u>Equality of Educational Opportunity</u>. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966.

they will need to tie plans of evaluation to all programs and become much more sophisticated in using evaluation data than they are at present.

By way of summary, I have tried to describe the school board tradition as it developed prior to 1940 and to suggest the constraints that began with World War II and that have made the early tradition untenable, particularly in an ever increasing urban society. Finally, I have suggested that city boards will tend to become more representative, that boards will deal extensively with citizens, that boards will oversee some form of organizational federation in which many functions are decentralized, that boards will play a more active political role at all levels of government, and that boards will be called upon to deal more fully with the evaluation of results than they do at present. I have tried to be objective in this analysis. Some of these directions please me, some do not. I do not espouse them, I have attempted to describe them.

Let me close this paper with a few personal convictions. If city board members are to work effectively in this emerging world, they will have to reconsider their own roles and the ways they allocate their time. I suspect board members need to listen more than they do at present. Meetings should somehow deal with policy more and daily operation less. Extensive time demands such as board members serving as members of negotiating teams for weeks on end should be terminated. Board members may have to have help in sifting out and checking crucial information. Constantly, a board member must seek to understand the big picture and be determined to represent the people of his city in seeking the best possible school programs for the children, youth, and adults of the city. The board member cannot become captive of the superintendent or of the teacher's union or he loses his effectiveness.

As in all representative government, the board member must represent his constituents but he must do more. As he learns more about the school enterprise, I hope he will also lead his constituents. If board members can accommodate to the developments suggested here, they will have an important even though a different place in the years ahead.